

# Topic: P-16: Strengthening Pre-Kindergarten Through College Programs

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## ABSTRACT

*The New York State Regents Action Plan dramatically changes educational reform initiatives by requiring districts to sign a written contract specifying criteria for program, performance and fiscal accountability. Districts are required at the end of the school year to provide a written explanation as to whether or not the goals were achieved. On Wednesday, December 13, 2007, the New York State Board of Regents announced its support for P-16 action plans – to improve student achievement initiatives and college readiness and completion programs.*

## PRIVATE FUNDING

*T*he Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Wallace Foundation committed \$6.2 million dollars to implement these initiatives to improve New York State high school graduation rates, and college readiness and college completion rates.

## PUBLIC FUNDING

These private foundations committed this funding in response to the New York State Regents Action Plan set forth in October 2006 “to strengthen instruction, raise standards, improve graduation rates and increase accountability”. To implement the Regents Action Plan the New York State legislature and the Governor also increased public funding for state aid to school districts by an unprecedented \$1.7 billion dollars in the 2007-08 state budget. Governor Elliott Spitzer noted in his remarks on the Contracts for Excellence on January 26, 2007 at the State Education Department that “this is the largest infusion of public resources in our state’s history” and is tied to a strong comprehensive reform agenda. Governor Spitzer stated that “my vision for education reform is built on a single premise: to be effective new funding must be tied to a comprehensive agenda of reform and accountability”.

## CAMPAIGN FOR FISCAL EQUITY (CFE)

The historic public funding increase was predicated on Judge Leland DeGrasse’s decision that New York City was underfunding programs for students who were low on performance and low in achievement. The case was brought by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity and was affirmed by the New York State Court of Appeals. Judge DeGrasse’s decision called for an infusion of funds for operating costs, capital projects and new technology.

## P-16 ACTION PLAN

The P-16 Regents plan will strengthen relationships and partnerships from Pre-kindergarten through higher education. In order to implement this program the New York State Education Department is working with school districts and higher education institutions around the state to develop new improved and innovative programs which will allow New York State students to achieve success. For the first time this program stresses the importance of the development of personal relationships between and among the professionals involved at the transition points between elementary and junior high school, between junior high school and high school and between high school and college. These relationships will facilitate the seamless transition of students from one level to the next. Many initiatives are planned as an outgrowth of the Regents Action Plan including the Contracts for Excellence,

strengthening teacher education and preparation programs and providing opportunities for professionals at all levels to dialogue with one another.

### **CONTRACTS FOR EXCELLENCE**

The Contracts for Excellence demand program, performance and fiscal accountability. The Contract for Excellence contracts differ from previous programs because each district receiving funding must sign a written contract with the New York State Education Department specifying the measurable goals that will be achieved. These performance objectives will be tested at the end of the school year to hold the districts accountable. This accountability system will be strengthened in order to incorporate a growth model that would allow the measurement of a child's progress year after year. Fifty-five districts around the State signed Contracts with the New York State Education Department in November 2007 to further the achievement of students most in need.

### **TEACHER EDUCATION AND PREPARATION PROGRAMS**

The Regents Action Plan also requires the strengthening of teacher education and preparation programs in order to prepare teachers to meet the new written program, performance and fiscal accountability goals. Regent Meryl Tisch held a conference on July 12, 2007 at Teachers College, Columbia University, college and university presidents, deans, provosts, directors of teacher education programs and professors met to discuss "Teacher Education in New York State: Meeting the Needs of Our Present Students". Johanna Duncan-Poitier, the New York State Senior Deputy Commissioner of Education, reported that the following strategies were discussed at the forum for strengthening teacher preparation programs including: "expanding partnerships between colleges, schools and cultural institutions; offering more field based preparation, increasing research opportunities in education, increasing the financial incentives for teachers, targeted recruitment of prospective teachers in hard to staff areas, giving flexibility to colleges and universities to experiment with alternative approaches to education and expanding technology to help new teachers with curriculum and instruction.

### **REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE SESSIONS**

On November 8, 2007 Regent Geraldine Chapecy seized the moment to bring the New York State Education Department in Albany to Queens in New York City to a regional Regents P-16 Educational Leadership Forum at St. John's University to discuss important topics impacting P-16 educators and to identify new opportunities for advancing the P-16 agenda. The Educational Leadership Forum was conducted in partnership with the New York City Department of Education, the City University of New York, and the United Federation of Teachers. Attending the conference were elected legislators, Presidents, Deans and faculty of colleges and universities, superintendents, principals of all levels, teacher leaders, parents, directors of cultural institutions and libraries and labor leaders.

The focus of the presentation, the P-16 Action Plan was dynamically described by Senior Deputy Commissioner Johanna Duncan-Poitier and her team, Deputy Commissioners Joseph Frey, Sheila Evans Traumm and Rebecca Cort. The goals of the P-16 plan are twofold: (1) to close the great divide in achievement that presently exists along the lines of income, race, ethnicity, language and disability and (2) to keep up with growing demands for even more knowledge and skill as competition increases in a rapidly changing global technology economy.

Accomplishing these related goals requires unprecedented collaboration among educators, parents, elected leaders and employers. All levels of education – pre-kindergarten, elementary, middle, high school and higher education must work closely together – focusing on transitions from P-16 – making a commitment to engage everyone. The Round Table discussions at the Forum were lively, current, animated, practical and productive. New professional relationships were formed. Plans for visiting partner schools were initiated as were follow-up conferences.

In New York State at the historic time in education the Regents P-16 Action Plan has the necessary ingredients to raise achievement and close performance gaps across the Pre-kindergarten through higher education (P-16) continuum. The new accountability system will require changes not only in the direct services to children but will also require changes in the teacher and administrator preparation programs in the colleges and universities.

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